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ABSTRACT

In Argentina, vocational guidance is used to identify psychological and educational resources to help people through transitions and changes, and to develop training, job-related projects, and strategies useful to acquire new competencies. Though public policies favoring the development of an integrated national counseling system do not exist, many intermediate organizations provide free guidance programs. Public universities have the most efficient and organized guidance services. Guidance is also delivered through health services, and some state hospitals provide free vocational guidance services as part of their mental health programs. Many counselors attempt to meet the needs of the population through private practice as well. Priority areas for the future include: defining a policy for career guidance; creating a system that ensures access to career guidance by the whole population; increasing the education budget; and creating regional information and guidance centers. Actions needed in order for these events to occur include increasing the national budget; coordinating educational levels to facilitate transitions; training counselors; and defining ethical principles for counseling. (JDM)

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Career Development in Argentina

By

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7. CAREER DEVELOPMENT IN ARGENTINA

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Present Social and Economic Context

Argentina is the southernmost country in South America. This geographical location has endowed Argentina with a wide variety of climates, from the warm north to the cold south and a consequent variety in population density rates. Some regions have only 0.7 inhabitants per km^2, while Buenos Aires, the capital of the Argentine Republic, has a density of 14,000 inhabitants per km^2. The total population is 38,000,000. Argentina has an area of 4,000,000 km^2 and is divided into 24 provinces.

The population shows widely differing characteristics, mostly due to European immigration, which began in the early 20th century, especially from Spain and Italy, and to a lesser extent from Eastern Europe. In the last few years, people from neighbouring countries and from Asia have also settled in Argentina. This merging of cultures and lifestyles has given the country a special profile that frequently differentiates it from other Latin American countries.

In the last decades, Argentina has become aware of its inclusion as a Latin American country, sharing with others the same origin as a nation and the same severe problems: poverty, unemployment, sub-employment, income distribution inequalities and the deterioration of social services. Key sectors, such as education, health, housing, work and culture, are being neglected because the resources applied to improve the quality of life are seen more as non-productive expenses than as productive investments. A more balanced view of the economic and social dimensions of development still remains to be achieved.

The economic and social aspects of globalization affect Argentina in the political, technological and cultural spheres. Internationalization brought about an increased cross-border exchange of products and economic activities, especially with closely related countries, for example, the MERCOSUR (Paraguay, Uruguay and Brazil) and Chile.

In the late '80s, Argentina experienced a deep economic crisis that increased unemployment, sub-employment and poverty. The significant economic changes of the '90s strengthened the growth of the Argentine economy, but also brought a precariousness that affects mainly the young, women and adults over 50. A recent social phenomenon is the "new poor": the increasing pauperization of the middle class. One of the greatest problems Argentines face is unemployment, which increased from 5.7 percent in 1988 to 17 percent in 1998. Vast sectors of the population have to change jobs, find new occupations or create their own means of subsistence. A systematic state policy to deal with retraining workers excluded from the market, has not yet been implemented.

Argentina has a democratic government with a clear division between the executive, legislative and judiciary branches. The country's organization is federal, with each province having an autonomous government and its own laws that do not contradict the spirit of the National Constitution. The Ministry of Education is responsible for the educational system.

Education is guaranteed through a federal education act, enacted in 1993. The act provides free and compulsory education for citizens from 5 to 15 years of age. The act also establishes education as the responsibility of families, the state, provinces, municipalities, the Catholic church and other officially recognized religious and social organizations. Private schools are subject to authorization and supervision by the official education authorities.

Under the act, the Ministry of Culture and Education must provide technical assistance and technical/professional education and training, at every level of the educational system. The act also establishes levels, cycles and special regimes forming the structure of the educational system. These should be developed to facilitate transfers and continuity, ensuring students both horizontal and vertical mobility. According to the act, the national state is responsible for establishing educational policy and controls its implementation. The act follows certain basic principles: the right to teach and learn, equal opportunities for everyone, rejection of any type of discrimination, promotion of equity, cultural and religious diversity, and the development of special programs to allow all citizens to enter the education system, remain and complete their education. The act promotes lifelong education and work as a personal and social goal. It encourages the integration of persons with special needs, supports educational innovations and the right of students to receive guidance.

Government and administration of the educational system are shared by the Ministry of Culture and Education, the Culture and Education Federal Council (co-ordination and joint actions), provincial ministries, the City of Buenos Aires and the schools themselves. Recently, the educational system was decentralized and all education services (except universities) were

transferred to the provinces. This had a negative impact for regions with few economic resources. Though the law guarantees citizens' free access to public institutions at any level within the educational system, negative social and economic factors have increased the drop-out rate, even within the compulsory education period. People excluded from the system can only work in unstable conditions because they lack the competencies and qualifications provided by education. The same happens to older persons, who cannot access a permanent and ongoing educational process that could help them develop new qualifications.

Educational System Structure
There are several levels to the education structure in Argentina.

- **Initial level.** Kindergarten exists for children aged from 3 to 5. Attendance is only compulsory for the last year of the cycle.

- **Basic general education level** (EGB). This level is organized into three, three-year cycles (nine years total) and focusses on offering basic competencies.

- **Polimodal level.** This is an optional cycle given to young people up to the age of 17. It offers different possibilities oriented toward the world of employment: humanistic subjects, social sciences, business economy and management, natural sciences, production of goods and services, communication, arts and design. Youth are trained in work- and production-related competencies and skills. It also provides preparation for post-secondary education. The polimodal level was implemented a short time ago within the frame of educational reform which has not yet become generalized. The structures to implement student apprenticeships and work experiences in companies are not yet available.

- **Higher education.** This level comprises the following.
  - Non-university schools train teachers and professors for the initial level, EGB and polimodal levels. There also are programs for technicians in non-educational areas. These last from two to four years. (University programs are called careers in Argentina.)
  - Universities offer professional and academic training in all areas and specialties. They are autonomous regarding academic, administrative and economic/financial matters. The main financial contribution to universities comes from federal funding, to ensure that services will be provided to all people. Expansion in university enrollment and economic adjustments (decreased budgets) by government put public universities in an extremely difficult situation. At present, these universities allocate 90 percent of their funds to salaries. Higher education in public universities has no

tuition fees. Only a few universities have entrance examinations. Changing careers or dropping out are frequent occurrences during the first year. Most university careers last from four to six years. In Argentina, there are over 500 higher education careers offered through 35 public and 40 private universities, and five public and four private university institutes. Private universities charge a fee and, in most cases, students must pass an entrance examination or take an introductory course. Some universities offer short careers (from one to three years).

- Postgraduate education is provided by universities and high-level academic, scientific and professional institutions. Candidates for master's or doctorate courses must hold a college degree. Fees are charged for these courses.
- Other education alternatives are offered by the provinces and the city of Buenos Aires in the form of short-term education courses with specific occupational training for persons with special needs and adult, artistic and non-formal education, as well as training in other areas.

Freedom of Choice

Young persons finishing the polimodal school and wishing to continue their studies may choose post-secondary, university, or non-university alternatives, according to their interests, preferences and projects. In general, there are no selection procedures to enter the public education system; however, many private universities establish entrance conditions. Students select careers on the basis of personal preferences. In general, universities provide a common basic cycle as an introduction to college studies, which may last from one month to one year. This period may be different for each college or career within the same university. In some cases, there are pre-university courses providing candidates with the specific knowledge required for certain subjects. However, self-selection and non-visible selection procedures do come into play. This means that social, economic, cultural, family and school environmental factors influence achievement and choice of educational and employment careers.

Career Development: Current Situation

Background

Argentina has pioneered the vocational guidance area in Latin America. The state-funded Instituto de Psicotecnia y Orientación Profesional (Psychological Techniques and Professional Guidance Institute) was created in 1925, and included a postgraduate course for guidance counsellors. The Psychology Institute was created in 1929 within the sphere of the National Education Council. Other institutions followed, such as the Educational Psychology Directorate of the Province of Buenos Aires, the Educational and Vocational Guidance Centre of the Primary Schooling Directorate) and

the Vocational Guidance Department of the University of Buenos Aires. Since then, many services were organized throughout the country, although their development has not been sustained for several reasons, particularly, the absence of public policies in the area of professional guidance and insufficient budgets.

In Argentina, counselling was linked to psychology from the very beginning. The 1960s witnessed the creation of psychology careers in the national universities. It was a time of significant theoretical production based on the psychodynamic approach to guidance problems. Innovative approaches were developed both for individuals and groups. In those years, guidance services proliferated in many national universities and similar services were organized in primary and high schools. The 1980s and 1990s brought deep political, social and economic change. The restoration of democracy, integration with the rest of the world, globalization, technological development, and changes in the economy and the labour market influenced the social scenario and modified guidance practices. Existing services were refocussed to meet the urgent needs of the population: job seeking, job retraining and career re-orientation.

In Argentina, the generic term "vocational guidance" (sometimes "vocational and occupational guidance") is used to identify psychological and educational resources to help people through transitions and changes throughout their lives, and to develop and review training, job-related projects and strategies useful to acquire new competencies and career development. Though public policies favouring the development of an integrated, national counselling system do not exist in Argentina, many intermediate organizations (schools, universities, hospitals, municipalities, etc.), and some private entities, provide free guidance programs.

Guidance within the Educational System

Guidance at school (EGB and polimodal levels)

The Federal Education Act establishes the right of students to receive vocational, academic and professional/occupational counselling to facilitate work market placement or the continuation of further studies. However, schools do not provide any ongoing vocational guidance programs. Many public or private schools have counsellors that help students, professors, teachers and parents on matters related to learning, school and social adaptation, and vocational guidance. Professionals trained in psychology or education often are not specifically trained in vocational guidance. In some schools, this task is performed by tutors or professors considered capable of assisting students in these areas. In some districts and communities (e.g., the province and the city of Buenos Aires), there are organized activities in each school. Such activities still have not become systematic programs. Rather, they are individual activities aimed at decision-making processes.

At the EGB level, counsellors use various strategies to train teachers in charge of guidance activities, advise parents, work directly with students on their interests and skills, and provide information on the next educational level. At the polimodal level, strategies include discussion and information groups on educational and professional alternatives. At both levels, guidance is considered more as an individual intervention, at the end of the school period, rather than a learning and developmental process.

Guidance in universities

Public universities have the most efficient and organized guidance services. In Argentina, universities play a significant role as social, cultural and scientific development centres, both in large towns and in some regions with low population density and scarce economic resources. Universities establish agreements with schools and, together, they develop information and guidance programs for students in the period when they select their career. University counselling services are free of charge. The main population is aged from 16 to 25. To a lesser degree, service is designed for young adults who need guidance and information when choosing their career, planning their occupational future, re-orienting their career choices, selecting postgraduate courses or becoming acquainted with new training possibilities or education for work insertion.

In the last few years, many public universities have expanded their services by incorporating work guidance activities and now provide information on the regional and national demand for professionals. The personnel in charge of these services are psychologists, educational psychologists, education specialists or social assistants who are not well paid and who lack sufficient resources to develop their work, but who compensate for the lack of budget and clear policies through personal efforts and creativity.

In the last decades, some private universities have included counselling among the services offered to their students. They rarely provide advisory services to the community. The information and guidance tasks they develop are more related to institutional promotion activities.

Guidance in hospitals and health services

Some state hospitals provide free vocational guidance services as part of their mental health programs. This practice has not been adopted at a national level. In general, these services are provided in hospitals located in large towns, especially in Buenos Aires and surrounding areas. Professional psychologists and educational psychologists provide counselling. Although they are sometimes not paid for their work, they consider it an excellent chance to carry out professional practices. Their work is supervised by the mental health service heads or by recognized external professionals who offer their time to supervise and train young counsellors.

Guidance in private practice

Since there are no policies for guidance and no continuity or financial support for guidance services, many counsellors have attempted to meet the needs of the population through private practice. In general, this occurs in urban centres, and the services are provided to middle- or high-income people, the only ones who can afford these services. During the last few years, many organizations implemented job training programs for the young, helping them to design, plan and manage small companies, produce materials or provide community services. They are intended for young persons within the polimodal system, who receive counselling on management, marketing and production techniques. International organizations and private companies or foundations finance these activities.

Work Training

Many sectors agree to the redesign of the work training system, since it is insufficiently developed and inadequate for the requirements of the job market. There are national, provincial and local training services. The training is homogeneous, elementary and scarce, while the demands of the population are heterogeneous regarding age, previous qualifications and expectations. Except for some public programs implemented by the state, and the training services offered by large companies, companies and trade unions generally do not have any significant training activities.

Training provided by companies is, in general, addressed to people who are already qualified and who carry out executive functions. In the case of new technologies, workers are trained for specific functions.

Work education for the young

This has been scarce and intended for those who did not finish high school. Professional training centres (CFP) provide two-year, pre-occupational courses for teenagers and four-month courses for young people and adults. They offer traditional specialties: electricity, carpentry, construction and apparel production for women. It is a rigid and bureaucratic system.

Adult education

The objectives here include upgrading for people who did not complete the EGB or who intend to improve their training to continue studying at other levels. Adult training is also given within professional training and retraining programs.

Professional training and employment programs

In 1993, the Ministry of Labor and Social Security implemented several temporary employment programs aimed at helping unemployed people experiencing serious social and economic difficulties, such as workers who had lost their jobs and other groups at risk, e.g., women and the young. These programs were funded by the state and through loans from

international organizations and non-governmental organizations. In 1998, several of these programs were suspended and others were redesigned. At present, the following programs are still operating.

- Proyecto Joven (Project for the Young) is aimed at young people between 16 and 35 with low job qualifications. They are offered training in specific fields. It includes a three-month course and an apprenticeship in a company for another three months. During the course, participants receive minimum wage and employment alternatives.

- Programa Trabajar III (Employment III Program) offers temporary employment (three months at minimum wage) to persons not receiving unemployment compensation, to those who are extremely poor and unemployed, and to vulnerable groups.

- Programa Servicios Comunitarios II (Community Services II Program) offers employment for brief periods (three to six months) to unemployed workers, especially women who are family heads. The tasks are related to projects and services. They receive a salary of US$160/month and medical assistance in exchange for four hours of community work.

- Programa de Apoyo al Empleo (Employment Support Program) is specially aimed at workers who lost their jobs in certain regions of the country where local industries closed down.

In addition, the Secretariat for Social Development has started projects aimed at minors at risk who are residing in the most impoverished geographical areas. Such projects include work training and the creation of micro-businesses.

Training for Counsellors

Although almost all professionals working in this field are psychologists, educational psychologists or specialists in education, the training they receive is usually insufficient for their work as counsellors. As a result, many continue their training through postgraduate courses or master's degrees. The demand for specialization has grown in the last few years, and some state universities have implemented postgraduate courses for vocational counsellors. In 1999, the University of Buenos Aires implemented an updating program and a master's degree to train counsellors as education specialists or psychologists.

Two Argentine counsellor associations — Asociación de Profesionales de la Orientación de la República Argentina (APORA) and Asociación Argentina de Orientadores Vocacionales de Universidades Nacionales (AOUNAR) — are also offering courses, seminars and annual meetings through which

counsellors from the whole country exchange experiences and evaluate their practices. These exchange forums are frequent and valuable. In the last few years, meetings were held with the participation of counsellors from neighbouring countries, especially Uruguay, Brazil and Chile. Counsellor associations also have developed a code of ethics. Although there are some guidelines for professional practice, there is no official control on activities within the guidance sector. This is starting to create some concern because many private organizations give brief courses with little scientific or technical foundation, which do not provide sufficient training for counselling activities.

Information Resources

In Argentina, there are several education guidebooks which include information on careers and post-secondary courses. Each university has its own guidebook and a Web page. The Student Guidance Directorate of the University of Buenos Aires has been publishing an annual study guidebook since 1959 that is widely disseminated. It contains information on higher education university and non-university courses given by public and private institutions throughout the country. It also contains information on various occupational fields.

Computer information is very recent, and not all counsellors are acquainted with it. There are two main information systems. The SOVI (Computerized Vocational Guidance System) (Fogliatto and Pérez, 1997) is aimed at clarifying interests and preferences. DATAVOC (Del Compare and Villamil, 1995) is a system containing information on the characteristics of all study and work areas, higher education alternatives and occupational fields. It is updated yearly.

Current Developments

In the last decade, the Student Guidance Directorate and the vocational and occupational chair of the Psychology College at the University of Buenos Aires have been developing technological assistance programs for the educational system. Prof. Diana Aisenson is managing this project. The programs provide advice and counselling in public and private schools of the EGB and polimodal level for students, teachers, professors, parents and counsellors through agreements with schools, municipalities, foundations and other representative institutions of the community. Activities include information fairs, workshops, vocational guidance groups, work training and guidance programs, and training seminars for counsellors. A program aimed at retirement preparation and interest re-orientation was also implemented through an agreement with the pension and retirement organization, PAMI. Another project under way is a guidance program for the development and socialization of children and young people, implemented through apprenticeships for counsellors in kindergartens.

They work together with teachers and families in a district where there is extreme social vulnerability.

The Science and Technology Secretariat of the University of Buenos Aires is funding research on employment and education projects, strategies and social representations of young people finishing high school, as well as a study on educational and employment careers. A research project is being developed within the frame of the national universities with the co-ordination of AOUNAR. This project uses the same questionnaire (adapted to Argentina) as the one used by the Canadian Career Development Foundation in the research project performed in Canada in 1993 (see Conger et al., 1994). The goal is to survey the vocational guidance services provided in the educational sector and the resources available. In the private sphere, some guidance-related research projects and research on occupational motivation are also under way (e.g., Mignone de Faletty and Moreno, 1999).

Current Strategic Issues

In Argentina, there are no defined and co-ordinated national policies for the development of a national guidance system. The 1993 Federal Education Act described earlier guarantees students the right to receive vocational, academic and professional/occupational guidance. However, since its enactment, the situation has not undergone any substantial change. Educational system reforms offer citizens a longer compulsory education and new curricula, and provide for training opportunities to improve their integration into the labour market. The results of these changes remain to be seen. Currently, many young persons ending their high school cannot achieve employment, and many lack the skills required by the current labour market.

As described above, the Ministry of Labor has implemented several training programs to overcome the dire unemployment situation. Most of these programs were designed to overcome the crisis and temporarily reduce unemployment in the most vulnerable sectors of the population. Unfortunately, these programs were only partially successful, because brief training courses or temporary financial assistance, are not enough to acquire the competencies required by the labour market. Thus, participants do not improve employability and, generally, the programs do not succeed in connecting participants with training or employment networks that could provide social support and allow them to improve their situation.

Many companies and intermediate organizations offer scholarships or six- to 12-month apprenticeships to the young. These measures can result in tax reductions, but due to the lack of a clear policy and properly co-ordinated actions, they end up being temporary solutions that do not always benefit the young. Evaluations indicate, in general terms, that the tasks undertaken

by young people in these programs do not improve their qualifications nor lead them to improve their learning. In general, few of the young persons stay in the companies after completing their apprenticeships. The lack of co-ordination between the various social players — companies, unions, other intermediate organizations and the government — reduces the effectiveness of these programs.

With regard to guidance services, existing programs are, in general, sufficient for the demands of the population receiving them, but they are far from covering all the people who need them. There is a need to expand services to wider segments of the population, implement them at schools (after including them in the curricula), make sure information and guidance aspects are always available, not just at decision-making time, and integrate guidance more fully within training and employment programs. Counselling services have been mainly aimed at young people aged 16 to 25. Adults were included as guidance targets only recently, to meet increased demand by unemployed adults or young adults seeking different training or employment alternatives.

Some of the strategic issues we consider important and which need to be addressed in the future are listed below.

- Give priority to increasing the investment in education (3.9 percent of the gross national product in 1998), as budgetary restrictions hinder the implementation of reforms. (Ninety percent of the available budget is allocated to teacher salaries.)

- The growth in the schooling rate has been accompanied by a high drop-out rate (around 50 percent), deterioration of quality, an increase in inequality and educational segmentation. In other words, there has been an increase in school failures, repeats and drop-outs.

- The increase in educational segmentation is a growing concern. Since the schools were transferred to provincial jurisdiction in 1992, differences from region to region, and among schools in the same region, increased. This leads to different levels of quality which, in turn, tends to reproduce inequality.

- The challenge is to improve the quality of education for everybody. The young leaving formal schooling before having acquired basic skills will only obtain precarious jobs, and run the risk of being excluded from the labour market and from social life. It is imperative to redefine the links between education and work.

- Actions to "professionalize" the young leaving schools are important. Programs should be developed to identify and strengthen basic, interactive and social competencies. Social networks are needed to

promote insertion into the labour market or act as intermediaries. Provide integral training experiences and allow individual participation and integration into better social circumstances.

- Finally, there is the need for the co-ordination of the actions developed by different public organizations in the vocational and occupational guidance area.

Key Issues for the Future

Based on our analysis of the situation in Argentina, we see some key priority areas that need to be addressed and some action that needs to be taken.

- Define a policy with regard to career guidance and education, and achieve a statutory framework to plan the actions required. Implement and co-ordinate them with existing activities to promote human resource development.

- Create a system that ensures access to career development guidance by the whole population, including both the young and adults.

- Increase the education budget, allowing for the creation of the necessary conditions to provide quality training for everybody.

- Organize and incorporate the counselling system in schools and include it in the curriculum. Its main objectives should be to prevent school failures, develop future training and work projects, identify and develop competencies, accompany the students in work learning experiences, and support them in transition periods and in the construction of their personal and social identity.

- Provide connections between school sectors and the production sphere in order to develop apprenticeships and dual training experiences.

- Implement programs allowing all children and young people to access and complete their studies, as well as develop permanent education, as stated in the Federal Education Act.

- Incorporate into the professional and university system, services and programs aimed at covering the guidance needs of their participants.

- Create regional information and guidance centres in strategic areas and in community environments.

- Promote the creation of a computerized data bank, connected to education and employment organizations at national, regional and world levels.

- Implement remote information and counselling systems for towns located far from urban centres.

- Implement retraining and ongoing training programs for counsellors.

- Promote the design of instruments and resources for counselling activities and the ongoing evaluation of innovative practices and resources to ensure their effectiveness.

- Co-ordinate career development guidance programs in the schools from the ministries of Culture and Education, and Work and Social Security. Also co-ordinate the national, provincial and local levels responsible for training.

Required Steps

Nine steps are required to implement the proposed actions outlined above.

1. Increase the national budget for education required to sustain the reforms proposed by the Federal Education Act.

2. Co-ordinate the educational levels and cycles to facilitate transition and continuity, and ensure horizontal and vertical mobility for EGB, polimodal, post-secondary and university students.

3. Train counsellors by professionalizing the services, defining the rules of professional practice and developing guidance competencies.

4. Increase university participation in the training and upgrading of EGB and polimodal teachers.

5. Carry out research regarding various educational and employment careers for young persons and adults, in issues such as gender, family and school socialization, and the social context.

6. Define ethical principles for counselling.

7. Develop educational, vocational and occupational guidance programs taking into account cultural diversity.

8. Promote the creation of a national centre for education and employment information and guidance. Put this centre in charge of designing research projects, instruments and techniques, producing educational and occupational information at regional and national levels, and developing counsellor education and training programs.

9. Create a permanent consultation forum of educators, representatives of the work and production sphere, government officials, politicians and representatives of the professional counselling associations.

Reference

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